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**New Survey: Kids without Dental Coverage Are Less Likely to Get Needed Care, Experience Double the Rate of Toothaches or Other Major Dental Problems**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A new national survey of U.S. parents shows that children without dental insurance were twice as likely as insured kids to have had a recent toothache or other dental problem that affected their ability to eat, sleep or concentrate in school. The survey reveals the crucial impact of dental coverage at a time when Congress is considering plans to significantly alter key programs—including Medicaid—through which many U.S. children and families are covered.

The survey of 605 parents of children up to age 21 was conducted March 3-5 by Public Policy Polling. The survey was commissioned by the Children's Dental Health Project and sponsored by the Benevis Foundation.

Other key findings from the parent survey include:

- Within the past year, 13% of parents said their children were “in need of dental care but not able to receive it.” However, parents of uninsured kids were nearly three times as likely (26%) to have children who went without care than parents whose kids were insured (9%).
- Affordability is the major reason parents reported why their children needed but did not obtain dental care. In fact, parents were roughly seven times more likely to cite cost (57%) as they were to cite “difficulty getting to the dentist.”
- Dental access issues were more pronounced among low-income and minority respondents. Parents with annual incomes below \$30,000 were twice as likely (28%) and Hispanic parents were nearly three times more likely (34%) to report their children were in need of dental care but unable to receive it. Hispanic (35%), Asian (11%) and African-American parents (10%) were also more likely than White parents (2%) to report that their children had visited an emergency room for a dental problem in the past year.
- Parents were asked whether the debate in Washington D.C. about the future of health coverage made them feel more secure, feel less secure or feel no different. Just under half (45%) said they felt less secure, 27% felt more secure, 23% felt no different and 4% were unsure.

- Pediatricians and other medical staff can play meaningful roles in children’s oral health. In the survey, only 35% of parents said their children’s doctor talked or asked about dental issues during the last few medical appointments.

Although the attention over medical and dental coverage is focused on those insured through Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, Congress has yet to extend funding for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), whose funding will expire at the end of September.

“This survey speaks loud and clear—coverage counts,” said Meg Booth, executive director for the Children’s Dental Health Project. “When children are covered by Medicaid, CHIP or private insurance, they are more likely to have regular dental visits. And they are far less likely to have serious oral health problems that can cause pain and disrupt their lives.”

The parent survey findings reflect recent research on children’s dental health access. A recent [\*Journal of the American Dental Association\*](#) study found that uninsured children had the fewest dental appointments and their parents were most likely to report unmet dental health needs due to cost. Children’s dental health needs are also especially pronounced in low-income, minority, and rural communities, according to a 2016 Pew Charitable Trusts [analysis](#).

Nationwide, more than 18 million low-income children went without dental care, including routine exams, in 2014. More than 4 million children did not receive needed dental care because their families could not afford it. Even when controlling for insurance status, low-income and minority children are less likely to receive preventive dental care, according to the analysis.

Without access to preventive dental care, many patients are left to seek expensive emergency dental care for unaddressed oral health needs. According to a report from the ADA, in 2012 there were more than two million dental-related visits to hospital emergency rooms, which accounted for about [\\$1.6 billion](#) in health costs.

Research shows children with poor oral health are nearly three times more likely to miss school than their healthier peers. A California study found that teens with recent dental pain were four times more likely to earn lower grade-point averages than healthier teens in the same schools. In 2012, the Bipartisan Policy Center reported that 62% of the U.S. Army’s new recruits were “not immediately deployable because of a significant dental issue.” Military health experts reported that dental disease was a common cause of non-battle injuries that required evacuation from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“Children with poor oral health often grow up to become adults with poor oral health,” said David King, a Benevis Foundation board member. “That has consequences for our nation in so many ways. The best way to stop the cycle of dental disease is to prevent it.”

To view the complete survey results, go to <http://bit.ly/2nQfb2j>.

### **About the Children's Dental Health Project**

The Children's Dental Health Project (CDHP) is an independent nonprofit that creates and advances innovative policy solutions so that no child suffers from tooth decay. Based in Washington, D.C., we are driven by the vision of all children achieving optimal oral health in order to reach their full potential. CDHP uses data measurement and analysis to advance models that incentivize oral health, not just payment for treating the symptoms of dental disease. CDHP seeks to lead the way toward a health care system that is truly inclusive of oral health, from payment to care delivery. Learn more about us at [www.cdhp.org](http://www.cdhp.org).

### **About the Benevis Foundation**

The Benevis Foundation is a 501(c)3 organization committed to improving dental healthcare access and outcomes through research, education and outreach. The foundation sponsors ongoing research on the role of Medicaid dental providers in improving access to preventative care, early intervention, and dental health education among traditionally underserved pediatric populations, as well as research on the cost savings associated with improving access to dental care in both federal and state healthcare systems. Through these research efforts, the Benevis Foundation aims to provide data that informs and strengthens public policy related to dental access and affordability. For more information, visit <https://benevis.com/benevis-foundation/>.